
METL Development and Training Management in the Military Police Regiment

By Colonel David F. Treuting

With an overwhelming victory in Operation Desert Storm, one would have thought that the Army had validated its way of warfighting. Instead, our performance in that war and in peacekeeping missions in the Balkans has become the catalyst for transformation and the creation of the Future Force vision. This vision suggests that Army combat support and combat arms not only be capable of performing warfighting and peacekeeping missions but also that they be able to do so with a lighter, more mobile, agile force that is just as lethal and survivable. Considering the fact that this is a vision for the future, the multipurpose role and functionality of the Military Police Corps has considerable relevance today. The capability of operating across the full spectrum of conflict comes with a significant expectation for training that cannot and must not be underestimated. With five functions—maneuver and mobility operations, area security operations, internment/resettlement operations, law and order operations, and police intelligence operations—that define that capability for an MP company, is there a particular way that leaders should be applying training doctrine to meet the expectation?

Despite an intensely active role as peacekeeper and peacemaker over the past decade, military police are expected to achieve success in tasks on a scale and scope that are scarcely routine. For very practical reasons, units are much more likely to train on tasks related to stability and support operations than warfighting. These considerations make an answer to the posed question inherently divisive, and a professional discussion on the topic is long overdue. There are very generally two schools of thought that drive training in our MP companies:

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- The mission of the combat support MP company is to provide support in the form of the five MP functions during peace, conflict, and war. Reality dictates that war plans are not likely to specify what tasks an MP company will receive. They must, therefore, be prepared to execute any and all of the five functions.
- Every combat support MP company is *designed* to provide MP support in the form of the five MP functions during peace, conflict, and war. Reality dictates that a company can only train on a specified number of collective tasks to proficiency. As a result, efforts must be focused on the most difficult of tasks—warfighting—with an understanding that the soldiers may be called upon to execute lesser tasks that they have not been trained to perform proficiently.

These two schools of thought are very closely related, but they could not be more different in terms of the training planning and execution required to support them. This article explores both approaches and asks a number of rhetorical questions but makes a series of suppositions that lead to one conclusion: respectively, our senior and tactical MP leaders must do a better job of enforcing and supporting prioritized, battle-focused training planning and execution with realistic training objectives that are consistent with the Army's training doctrine.

Training Expectations

The former Chief of Staff of the Army, General Eric Shinseki, made his expectations for the force perfectly clear, and every single word is critical to this discussion:

Ensure that our soldiers are physically and mentally prepared to dominate the next battlefield—no soldier goes into harm's way untrained.... The Army has an obligation to the American people to ensure its soldiers go into battle with the assurance of success and survival. Army forces cannot train for every possible mission; they train for war and prepare for specific missions as time and circumstances permit.... *Do less—do it well—*meet the standard [emphasis added].

The relevance of these comments is the foundation for all that follows, so read them again, or return to them

when you find a “sticky” point in the discussion. There is nothing branch-specific or revolutionary about these words. In fact, they were the rationale that produced Field Manual (FM) 25-100, *Training the Force* (now FM 7-0), and FM 25-101, *Battle Focused Training* (now FM 7-1), 13 years ago, and influenced their resurgence today.

General Shinseki’s words disarm the clever leader who declares that these FMs are “just guidelines” and make the words *battle focused*, *prioritized*, *trained to standard*—and especially *always* in the oft-quoted cliché “Mission First, People Always”—nonnegotiable. His guidance even suggests how to meet these high expectations: “Do less—do it well—meet the standard.”

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The definition of a mission-essential task list (METL) only serves to drive the point home: “A mission-essential task is a *collective task* an organization has to be *proficient* at in order to accomplish an appropriate *portion* of its wartime operational mission. Army organizations...*cannot achieve and sustain proficiency on every possible training task* [emphasis added].” Collectively, these references assert that a task be practiced, assessed, and repeated in successive training sessions before we declare *proficiency* in the capability. Is this being done in your unit? Is your company METL a list of prioritized *collective* tasks or is it a prioritized listing of all tasks? If you are an MP battalion or brigade commander, are you ensuring that companies have METLs that meet the expressed intent?

Although these FMs acknowledge the exceptional difficulty that every combat support unit has in light of their daily operational missions, the challenge of prioritizing training remains paramount and non-negotiable. If the reader intends to be truly objective in making a determination of how to apply this expectation to the tactical units of the Military Police Corps, there are several important factors that must be considered.

Translating the METL Process

To start, METL development is intended to work down, up, and across the chain of command with a communication among senior and subordinate commanders that is intended to provide optimal training management for tactical units that have varying limits of time and resources. At each respective level of command, leaders must be allowed to apply training management that is consistent with training doctrine: a senior leader provides the mission and guidance, but the subordinate leader is allowed to determine the METL. Both have a

responsibility to ensure that amidst a demand to operate in peace, conflict, and war, there are *priorities* for training.

Nearly a year ago, this process was reaffirmed as our guiding principle for planning training. Of particular note were the adjustments to the METL inputs, which used to be simply *war plans* and *external directives*. In FM 7-0, “directives” have become “guidance” and three new inputs have been added to the process: *combat capabilities*, *operational environments*, and *directed missions*. These may be new terms, but they are far from new concepts. In fact, they are suggestive of a need to improve how and what we choose to prioritize. The input of *enduring combat capabilities*, which is defined as the “unique contribution” that each unit makes to the team effort, is of particular note to the Military Police Corps, considering our unique capability is and always has been maintaining or enforcing law and order as well as protecting the “arteries” to and from a battlespace. Battlefield intelligence, area security, initial internment and resettlement, and even portions of maneuver and mobility support are not unique to military police. These should be considered when determining what tasks will be trained. The more senior the commander, the more inherent the responsibility for ensuring that the soldier at the bottom of the hierarchy has guidance that is significantly more specific than “do it all.”

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Translating MP Doctrine

As one of the key sources for determining the collective tasks for a unit’s METL—and *the* source for MP mission-to-task training for FM 7-0 and FM 7-1—the Army Training and Evaluation Program (ARTEP) 19-313-10-Mission Training Plan (MTP), *Mission Training Plan for Echelons Above Corps (EAC), Corps, and Division Military Police Platoons (Combat Support)*; and ARTEP 19-313-30-MTP, *Mission Training Plan for Echelons Above Corps (EAC), Corps, and Division Military Police Companies (Combat Support)*, are the most significant references available to our company leaders. In fact, you will rarely find a key leader without one of these documents under his arm during training planning and execution. Unfortunately, the interpretation and use of certain doctrinal terms within their first few chapters creates a great potential for confusion that is worthy of clarification.

First, as an example, it defines the MP company's mission and the use of the MP functions: "The company's mission is to provide military support during peace, conflict, and war. This MTP is comprised of five major functions that the company *must* execute to accomplish the mission [emphasis added]." Two pages later there seems to be a contradiction: "Prioritize the tasks that need training. You will never have enough time to train everything. You must orient on the greatest challenges and most difficult sustainment skills."

Although this seems contradictory, the -30 (as ARTEP 19-313-30-MTP is known) is a list of all of the MP collective tasks associated with our designed capability. They give no regard for the time or resources made available to any unit. More specifically, with over 60 percent of the MP Regiment in the Reserve Component and an Active Component that runs the gamut from corps support to division to modified table of organization and equipment law enforcement detachments, the -30 must serve as a tool for all MP companies. Units must perform their own respective analyses of time, resources available, and personnel, and then prioritize which tasks they will train. For example, a Reserve Component internment/resettlement company has a specified mission that allows for a much more narrow training focus than any combat support MP company. An active duty combat support MP company in Korea should have a far different training focus than that of the separate combat support MP company at Fort Benning, Georgia. Division MP companies have an opportunity to receive much more direct guidance on mission expectations than a combat support MP company at Fort Polk, Louisiana. In the end, the combat support MP company may be faced with preparing for a worst-case scenario, so the mission training plan offers the appropriate advice: "orient on the greatest challenges and most difficult sustainment skills."

One last factor should be considered when it comes to determining priorities: perishability of training. Consider how extensively soldiers and leaders must train to maintain proficiency in the most basic tasks of reading a map, firing a weapon, operating a Single-Channel, Ground-to-Air Radio System (SINCGARS), writing and disseminating orders, and coordinating plans. Now consider the relative complexity of bringing all of that together in any collective task, and then remember that we expect our most junior officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) to choreograph that execution successfully in combat or conflict. Individual training without collective execution in preparation for war or conflict is analogous to training a football team individually and then expecting the team to come together to win at game time. Maybe

the team will do well, but a football player's life doesn't depend on the function of the team.

Analyzing the Two Schools of Thought

School of Thought #1 directs that MP companies must be prepared to execute any and all of the five functions at any time. Although students of this camp may find comfort in the fact that the first sentence is supported verbatim in the -30 and FM 3-19.4, *Military Police Leaders' Handbook*, they must also recognize the unconstrained environmental context. If this school of thought is nevertheless true, then the logical corollaries with regard to preparedness and demonstrated proficiency must follow. Whether we use the terms *functions*, *missions*, or *task areas*, the -30 translates an MP company's capabilities into 71 collective tasks and a minimum of 35 collective tasks for any one of the functions. What this really means to a soldier or leader who must demonstrate proficiency in this capability, can be illustrated in the following example.

Of the 71 collective tasks, it would be more than practical to set aside collective tasks that read more like individual tasks (that is, those related exclusively to nuclear, biological, and chemical activities; unit maintenance; casualty handling; passive air defense; or even law enforcement). Our profession demands commanders and leaders who innovatively accomplish these tasks while in the Red Cycle or incorporate them into scenarios in the Green Cycle. Despite such economy of tasks—and even in consideration of the redundancy of individual and leader tasks represented in each—our MP company example from *School of Thought #1* must be able to collectively demonstrate Army standards of proficiency in all of these tasks:

- Deploy many units by air, land, or sea.
 - Secure and defend a unit position.
 - Conduct a delay or provide a screening force.
 - Conduct movement to contact, deliberate, and hasty attacks.
 - Conduct a battle handover to a tactical combat force.
 - Conduct MP support to a passage of lines.
 - Conduct cordon-and-search operations.
 - Set up and run an operational decontamination site.
 - Collect and process enemy prisoners of war.
 - Conduct civil disturbance control.
 - Conduct reconnaissance operations.
 - Conduct route regulation enforcement and signing.
 - Manage populace control (of any kind).
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- Conduct convoy security operations.
 - Support river crossings.
 - Operate a field detention center for U.S. military prisoners.
 - Support area damage control operations.
 - Conduct security of critical sites with associated physical security planning.
 - Redeploy and fully recover all assigned equipment.

These 19 uniquely different collective tasks are not all inclusive and don't even begin to address intrinsic leadership challenges such as the enforcement of consistency in training standards or observer/controller criterion; expectations and standards for operator and equipment maintenance throughout the training cycle; mandated training requirements; time available; and most notably for nearly every MP company, the preparation required to assume a three-shift workday for the law enforcement or mission/support cycle that most surely follows. Even the mission outlines of the -30 require proficiency in 21 different tasks. Either before or after 11 September 2001 (and even with the most ideal resources at hand and the most vague and subjective assessment standards available), it is difficult to imagine any unit accomplishing this training mission to standard. As this example clearly illustrates, it is not possible. In the end, whether units want to or not, they will invariably prioritize their training. In the end, and by definition, units will not be able to do what this school of thought professes is necessary or even possible to accomplish.

The students of *School of Thought #2*, however, use both the elaboration and specificity of the collective tasks in the MTPs to derive their METL. Since they realize that specific task selection is inevitable and proficiency in the selected tasks may determine the success or survival of soldiers, they base their training upon a worst-case scenario—warfighting. Being prepared to conduct all other tasks equates to having the manuals packed when the unit deploys, relying upon the likelihood of things like mission readiness exercises for lesser contingencies. Leaders that espouse this philosophy understand that all of the critical leader tasks are covered in any of the collective tasks already mentioned. An example of a METL under this school of thought may look like this:

- Coordinate deployment of forces.
- Conduct convoy security operations.
- Conduct a delay or provide a screening force.
- Conduct movement to contact.
- Conduct deliberate and hasty attacks.
- Coordinate redeployment and fully recover assigned equipment.

Though this METL too may be considered by some to be too large, it is considerably less demanding than performing all five MP functions and is arguably realistic for some commanders. In any case, it meets the principled intent of our training doctrine—prioritize!

Conclusion

The Military Police Corps is force structured and equipped to accomplish every single task associated with MP support under any circumstance, but *not at the same time*. Tactical-level MP soldiers and officers appreciate and understand that they may be called upon to execute a particular mission with less training, but they must be afforded a training opportunity that prepares them to do so successfully by design—not by hopes, assumptions, or motivational speeches; that's the contract. At the risk of reducing this topic to an oversimplified conclusion, an MP company METL should consist of collective tasks from our own MTP and nothing more. One of the related problems associated with the incorrect application of METL development is the simple fact that the term METL is too often used as an acronym and not often enough for its literal meaning. MP functions were intended to assist leaders in determining which collective tasks to train to be good at a particular facet of MP support. METLs composed of MP functions or missions not only fail entirely at meeting the intent of limiting what a unit has to train, but they also equate to veiled lists of unobtainable training expectations.

MP brigade or battalion commanders who have all five functions on their METLs must recognize the translation at the tactical level and allow commanders to “do less—do it well—meet the standard.” The Army's training doctrine demands a communication process that requires superiors to mentor their subordinates but also to listen to them. It has become increasingly popular for superiors to characterize operational experiences as

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training. Though there is a certain amount of merit to this assertion, this article stresses the need for discretion. True leadership challenges exist in every unit, but at a certain point, a disregard for the effects that these conditions have upon training readiness turns *leadership challenges* into a term that today's leaders have learned to avoid—zero defects.

When augmenting doctrine, operational experiences must be tempered with discretion and a firm understanding of the conditions from which the experiences were obtained. Being able to shoot from the hip and execute tactics or strategy that aren't found in any book is the hallmark of good leadership under stress in conflict, but not everyone operates from as sound a doctrinal foundation as they think. This is a vitally important consideration if we are to properly leverage our experiences with the training requirements for our units. For example, Desert Storm was an impressive victory—one so decisive that it left enemy units surrendering to camera crews when the ground war began. These are hardly the conditions we can expect to see from a determined adversary, and yet the ranks of the Military Police Corps swell with senior NCO and officer experiences that demonstrated a level of “success and survival” in combat that was grossly disproportionate to the training regimen of our units.

It would be extremely easy to dismiss this entire discussion, with all of its references and conclusions, as a list of complaints or intellectual jargon. But such a dismissal would be analogous to turning one's head to avoid the view of a burning building—the building will continue to burn whether the fire is addressed or not. A genuine adherence to METL development requires much more effort and constant review, assessment, and change (but then that was always the point of the process). Review the inputs to ensure that your unit has the right priorities in place. Responsibility for ensuring that some priorities exist rests at the top first, and then works its way down the ladder of command. Whatever the

individual answer or conclusion on this topic is, the bottom line is that it is the MP team, squad, and platoon that must execute the tasks in question when it really counts. If we fail to set the conditions for success that are absolutely possible through judicious selection of collective tasks, commanders and senior leaders of the Regiment may bear the discredit, but its soldiers will bear the cost.

Recommendations

No discussion is complete without recommendations, so here they are:

To the MP Senior Leaders, Officers, and NCOs. Remember the age-old adage, “we exist for the success of our young, not ourselves.” Continue or do better at opening and encouraging the dialogue with our branch's company commanders, lieutenants, and NCOs on this topic, and be mindful of the pitfalls discussed in this article when doing so. Maximize the effectiveness of this process in word *and* deed, demonstrating to the next generation that prioritization is principled and necessary. Good coaching and mentoring takes *time*, and it involves two-way communication that is not patronizing or undignified. They all know who you are and where you came from; you don't need to remind them or prove it to them by pointing out how little they know.

To the Tactical Level MP Leaders, Officers, and NCOs. Stand up for and do better with the training principles espoused in our doctrine. Follow these principles to a fault when it's your turn to personally lead soldiers and manage training. If you are faced with a situation where training expectations exceed the unit's capability, open the dialogue with your superiors and don't stop until it is fixed or you leave the unit. Do your job. Seek out coaches and mentors.

References

- FM 7-0, *Training the Force*, 22 October 2002.
 - FM 7-1, *Battle Focused Training*, 15 September 2003.
 - ARTEP 19-313-10-MTP, 10 April 1999.
 - ARTEP 19-1-313-30-MTP, 10 April 1999.
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